

# Socialism and the Student

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BY  
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“Why should I study Socialism?”

The speaker was a student in one of our great universities, a young man of twenty-two. There was a suggestion of hauteur in his voice as he addressed the question to the young man who had been trying to interest him in the subject.

“Why should I study Socialism?”

This question is being asked by earnest men and women wherever the challenge of Socialism to the heart and brain of the world is uttered. It is presumed, good reader, that YOU have asked the question, and this address is to YOU—an honest attempt to answer YOUR question. No effort will be made to convert you to Socialism. For the present it does not matter what your ultimate verdict will be, whether you will conclude that Socialism is good or evil, wise or unwise, practical or visionary: all that matters is that you should fairly and intelligently study it, that you understand it. You cannot afford to remain indifferent concerning the great international Socialist movement.

In the first place, every student ought to be mastered by one passion, the love of Truth. No matter how much maligned and reviled a movement may be, no matter how bitterly an idea may be assailed, the

true student will want to investigate before passing judgment. The ideal student is a bond-servant to Truth. Every institution of learning should be governed by the idea that the only orthodoxy is Truth and the only heresy Falsehood. Whether you are to espouse the cause of Socialism or oppose it, to know what it means is your first duty.

Secondly, the enormous growth of Socialism throughout the world makes it important that you study it as the greatest phenomenon in the social and political life of the world. In the year 1870, just a generation ago, there were thirty thousand Socialist voters in the civilized world. Today there are more than nine million Socialist voters, and if there were an opportunity for all adults to vote—if, that is to say, adult suffrage obtained in all countries—there would probably be at least three times as many. In the year 1888 there were 2,067 Socialist votes cast in the United States; twenty years later, in 1908, the number has risen to more than 500,000.

Finally, the challenge of Socialism is one that must be met with wisdom and courage. Is the indictment which the Socialist brings against the existing social order true or false, just or unjust? Is the Socialist interpretation of the tendencies of social evolution correct? Is the positive programme which it presents practical or visionary? These are questions which must be answered. The test of good citizenship and wise statesmanship will be the wisdom or unwisdom of the reply to these questions.

To a larger degree than ever before, the leaders of the nation, moulders of the national thought, are trained in our colleges and universities. We may confidently expect an ever-increasing influence on the

part of our institutions of learning. The function of the physician increases in scope as we develop the social aspects of our health problems. We see this fact in the enormous part which the leaders of the medical profession are taking in social reform. The minister of today, likewise, has to pay greater attention to Sociology than Theology if he would succeed. How, then, we may fairly ask, can the young man or woman who expects to enter either of these professions ignore the claims of the Socialist movement to respectful hearing and candid study?

And, above all, from our colleges and universities must be drawn the great mass of the makers and interpreters of the law, and the administrative forces of the nation. Legislators, judges and public officials are drawn from the ranks of those who have enjoyed the advantages of the higher education. It does not require very learned argument to demonstrate that, even as a matter of civic patriotism merely, those to whom such grave responsibilities are entrusted ought to be equipped to meet the issue of Socialism—to support Socialism if it is wise and just, to combat it if it is unwise and unjust.

Or suppose that your aim is to enter the literary profession. You have made up your mind that you will become a great journalist or author. You want to secure a hearing in the greatest of all forums, to wield power as a leader of public opinion. How, then, can you, of all people, afford to ignore the greatest social, intellectual and moral issue of the age in which you live? It matters not upon which side your influence is to be cast, you must understand what Socialism is. Otherwise you cannot render to society the service which it has a right to expect from you.

What is Socialism? Can you answer the question with a fair degree of assurance? Have you read the best literature upon the subject? Or are you, like the learned Chancellor of one of our universities, a victim of the silly superstition that the aim of Socialism is to divide the wealth of the nation equally among its inhabitants, regardless of their effort? Do you, like President Roosevelt, regard Socialism as a social "scheme" to make all men and women equal and to penalize the thrifty and industrious for the comfort of the shiftless and the lazy? Have you gathered the idea from your reading that Socialism means the abolition of all private property and the establishment of an immense bureaucratic government, the crushing of all individual liberty and initiative?

These are all common views of Socialism, largely current in our institutions of learning. Each of them is wholly wrong and without any warrant in fact. If, therefore, you are opposed to Socialism upon any or all of these grounds, you are fighting a shadow; you are tilting at windmills.

The Intercollegiate Socialist Society, for the reasons above stated, makes its appeal to YOU to study Socialism with earnestness and candor. The society exists for the sole purpose of promoting such study among those connected with our colleges and universities. Membership in the society does not imply agreement with Socialist principles and doctrines, but with the simple proposition that these should be carefully and seriously studied.

The society aims to promote the study of Socialism through the circulation of the best literature upon the subject, both pro and con; through the formation of study chapters wherever possible, and through

lectures and debates. It has at its disposal the services of the best lecturers upon the subject, and aims to keep its members in close touch with the best thought of the time relating to Socialism.

If you are willing to study carefully the Socialist indictment of present society, its interpretation of social tendencies, and its programme for the remedy of the most distressing social ills, the Intercollegiate Socialist Society offers you its services and invites you to membership.

Full information concerning the society can be obtained from the Secretary,

W. J. GHENT,

112 East 19th Street,

New York City.

# Intercollegiate Socialist Society

Organized September 12, 1905

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Students contemplating the organization of Study Chapters should send for printed matter, our list of books and outline of Study. The Society has capable and experienced lecturers upon its lists, and can reach any college. Wherever it is possible to hold a public meeting, the students should apply for a speaker. Time ought to be allowed for the necessary correspondence and to advertise the meeting properly. The aim of such an effort should be to organize a Study Chapter, which should defray its own expenses by a collection. Send the Secretary also names of all students likely to take up such a course of study.

